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CARCASSONNE

BY LORD DUNSANY

Dunsany, Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett,
18th baron.

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BY

Lord Dunsany

LIMITED EDITION

REPRINTED FOR
MISS VIRGINIA BERRY

JOHN W. LUCE & COMPANY
BOSTON

1916

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GIFT
MRS. WOODROW WILSON
NOV. 25, 1939

CARCASSONNE

Carcassonne

In a letter from a friend whom I have never seen, one of those that read my books, this line was quoted — "But he, he never came to Carcassonne." I do not know the origin of the line, but I made this tale about it.

When Camorak reigned at Arn, and the world was fairer, he gave a festival to all the Weald to commemorate the splendour of his youth.

They say that his house at Arn was huge and high, and its ceiling painted blue; and when evening fell men would climb up by ladders and light the scores of candles hanging from slender chains. And they say, too, that sometimes a cloud would come, and pour in through the top of one of the oriel windows, and it would come

over the edge of the stonework as the sea-mist comes over a sheer cliff's shaven lip where an old wind has blown for ever and ever (he has swept away thousands of leaves and thousands of centuries, they are all one to him, he owes no allegiance to Time.) And the cloud would re-shape itself in the hall's lofty vault and drift on through it slowly, and out to the sky again through another window. And from its shape the knights in Camorak's hall would prohesy the battles and sieges of the next season of war. They say of the hall of Camorak at Arn that there hath been none like it in any land, and foretell that there will be never.

Hither had come in the folk of the Weald from sheepfold and from forest, revolving slow thoughts of food, and shelter, and love, and they sat down wondering in that famous hall; and therein also were seated the men of Arn, the town that clustered round the King's high house, and was all roofed with the red, maternal earth.

If old songs may be trusted, it was a marvellous hall.

Many who sat there could only have

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seen it distantly before, a clear shape in the landscape, but smaller than a hill. Now they beheld along the wall the weapons of Camorak's men, of which already the lute-players made songs, and tales were told at evening in the byres. There they descried the shield of Camorak that had gone to and fro across so many battles, and the sharp but dinted edges of his sword; there were the weapons of Gadriol the Leal, and Norn, and Athoric of the Sleety Sword, Heriel the Wild, Yarold, and Thanga of Esk, their arms hung evenly all round the hall, low where a man could reach them; and in the place of honour in the midst, between the arms of Camorak and of Gadriol the Leal, hung the harp of Arleon. And of all the weapons hanging on those walls none were more calamitous to Camorak's foes than was the harp of Arleon. For to a man that goes up against a strong place on foot, pleasant indeed is the twang and jolt of some fearful engine of war that his fellow-warriors are working behind him, from which huge rocks go sighing over his head and plunge among his foes; and pleasant to a warrior in the wavering fight

are the swift commands of his King, and a joy to him are his comrades' distant cheers exulting suddenly at a turn of the war. All this and more was the harp to Camorak's men; for not only would it cheer his warriors on, but many a time would Arleon of the Harp strike wild amazement into opposing hosts by some rapturous prophecy suddenly shouted out while his hand swept over the roaring strings. Moreover, no war was ever declared till Camorak and his men had listened long to the harp, and were elate with the music and mad against peace. Once Arleon, for the sake of a rhyme, had made war upon Estabonn; and an evil king was overthrown, and honour and glory won; from such queer motives does good sometimes accrue.

Above the shields and the harps all round the hall were the painted figures of heroes of fabulous famous songs. Too trivial, because too easily surpassed by Camorak's men, seemed all the victories that the earth had known; neither was any trophy displayed of Camorak's seventy battles, for these were as nothing to his warriors or him compared with those

things that their youth had dreamed and which they mightily purposed yet to do.

Above the painted pictures there was darkness, for evening was closing in, and the candles swinging on their slender chain were not yet lit in the roof; it was as though a piece of the night had been builded in to the edifice like a huge natural rock that juts into a house. And there sat all the warriors of Arn and the Weald-folk wondering at them; and none were more than thirty, and all were skilled in war. And Camorack sat at the head of all, exulting in his youth.

We must wrestle with Time for some seven decades, and he is a weak and puny antagonist in the first three bouts.

Now there was present at this feast a diviner, one who knew the schemes of Fate, and he sat among the people of the Weald and had no place of honour, for Camorak and his men had no fear of Fate. And when the meat was eaten and the bones cast aside, the king rose up from his chair, and having drunken wine, and being in the glory of his youth and with all his knights

about him, called to the diviner, saying, "Prophesy."

And the diviner rose up, stroking his grey beard, and spake guardedly—"There are certain events," he said, "upon the ways of Fate that are veiled even from a diviner's eyes, and many more are clear to us that were better veiled from all; much I know that is better unforetold, and some things that I may not foretell on pain of centuries of punishment. But this I know and foretell—that you will never come to Carcassonne."

Instantly there was a buzz of talk telling of Carcassonne—some had heard of it in speech or song, some had read of it, and some had dreamed of it. And the king sent Arleon of the Harp down from his right hand to mingle with the Weald-folk to hear aught that any told of Carcassonne. But the warriors told of the places they had won to—many a hard-held fortress, many a far-off land, and swore that they would come to Carcassonne.

And in a while came Arleon back to the king's right hand, and raised his harp and chanted and told of Carcassonne.

Far away it was, and far and far away, a city of gleaming ramparts rising one over other, and marble terraces behind the ramparts, and fountains shimmering on the terraces. To Carcassonne the elf-kings with their fairies had first retreated from men, and had built it on an evening late in May by blowing their elfin horns. Carcassonne! Carcassonne!

Travellers had seen it sometimes like a clear dream, with the sun glittering on its citadel upon a far-off hill-top, and then the clouds had come or a sudden mist; no one had seen it long or come quite close to it; though once there were some men that came very near, and the smoke from the houses blew into their faces, a sudden gust—no more, and these declared that some one was burning cedarwood there. Men had dreamed that there is a witch there, walking alone through the cold courts and corridors of marmorean palaces, fearfully beautiful still for all her fourscore centuries, singing the second oldest song, which was taught her by the sea, shedding tears for loneliness from eyes that would madden armies, yet will she not call

her dragons home—Carcassonne is terribly guarded. Sometimes she swims in a marble bath through whose deeps a river tumbles, or lies all morning on the edge of it to dry slowly in the sun, and watches the heaving river trouble the deeps of the bath. It flows through the caverns of earth for further than she knows, and coming to light in the witch's bath goes down through the earth again to its own peculiar sea.

In autumn sometimes it comes down black with snow that spring has molten in unimagined mountains, or withered blooms of mountain shrubs go beautifully by.

When there is blood in the bath she knows there is war in the mountains; and yet she knows not where those mountains are.

When she sings the fountains dance up from the dark earth, when she combs her hair they say there are storms at sea, when she is angry the wolves grow brave and all come down to the byres, when she is sad the sea is sad, and both are sad for ever. Carcassonne! Carcassonne!

This city is the fairest of the wonders of Morning; the sun shouts when he be-

holdeth it; for Carcassonne Evening weepeth when Evening passeth away.

And Arleon told how many goodly perils were round about the city, and how the way was unknown, and it was a knightly venture. Then all the warriors stood up and sang of the splendour of the venture. And Camorak swore by the gods that had builded Arn, and by the honour of his warriors that, alive or dead, he would come to Carcassonne.

But the diviner rose and passed out of the hall, brushing the crumbs from him with his hands and smoothing his robe as he went.

Then Camorak said, "There are many things to be planned, and counsels to be taken, and provender to be gathered. Upon what day shall we start?" And all the warriors answering shouted, "Now." And Camorak smiled thereat, for he had but tried them. Down then from the walls they took their weapons, Sikorix, Kelleron, Aslof, Wole of the Axe; Huhenoth, Peacebreaker; Wolwuf, Father of War; Tarion, Lurth of the War-cry and many another. Little then dreamed the spiders that sat

in that ringing hall of the unmolested leisure they were soon to enjoy.

When they were armed they all formed up and marched out of the hall, and Arleon strode before them singing of Carcassonne.

But the folk of the Weald arose and went back well-fed to their byres. They had no need of wars or of rare perils. They were ever at war with hunger. A long drought or hard winter were to them pitched battles; if the wolves entered a sheep-fold it was like the loss of a fortress, a thunder-storm on the harvest was like an ambuscade. Well-fed, they went back slowly to their byres, being at truce with hunger: and the night filled with stars.

And black against the starry sky appeared the round helms of the warriors as they passed the tops of the ridges, but in the valleys they sparkled now and then as the starlight flashed on steel.

They followed behind Arleon going south, whence rumours had always come of Carcassonne: so they marched in the starlight, and he before them singing.

When they had marched so far that they heard no sound from Arn, and even in-

audible were her swinging bells, when candles burning late far up in towers no longer sent them their disconsolate welcome; in the midst of the pleasant night that lulls the rural spaces, weariness came upon Arleon and his inspiration failed. It failed slowly. Gradually he grew less sure of the way to Carcassonne. Awhile he stopped to think, and remembered the way again; but his clear certainty was gone, and in its place were efforts in his mind to recall old prophecies and shepherd's songs that told of the marvellous city. Then as he said over carefully to himself a song that a wanderer had learnt from a goatherd's boy far up the lower slope of ultimate southern mountains, fatigue came down upon his toiling mind like snow on the winding ways of a city noisy by night, stilling all.

He stood, and the warriors closed up to him. For long they had passed by great oaks standing solitary here and there, like giants taking huge breaths of the night air before doing some furious deed; now they had come to the verge of a black forest; the tree-trunks stood like those great col-

umns in an Egyptian hall whence God in an older mood received the praise of men; the top of it sloped the way of an ancient wind. Here they all halted and lighted a fire of branches, striking sparks from flint into a heap of bracken. They eased them of their armour, and sat round the fire, and Camorak stood up there and addressed them, and Camorak said: "We go to war with Fate, who has doomed that I shall not come to Carcassonne. And if we turn aside but one of the dooms of Fate, then the whole future of the world is ours, and the future that Fate has ordered is like the dry course of an averted river. But if such men as we, such resolute conquerors, cannot prevent one doom that Fate has planned, then is the race of man enslaved for ever to do its petty and allotted task."

Then they all drew their swords, and waved them high in the firelight, and declared war on Fate.

Nothing in the sombre forest stirred or made any sound.

Tired men do not dream of war. When morning came over the gleaming fields a

company that had set out from Arn discovered the camping-place of the warriors, and brought pavilions and provender. And the warriors feasted, and the birds in the forest sang, and the inspiration of Arleon awoke.

Then they arose, and following Arleon, entered the forest, and marched away to the South. And many a woman of Arn sent her thoughts with them as they played alone some old monotonous tune, but their own thoughts were far before them, skimming over the bath through whose deeps the river tumbles in marble Carcassonne.

When butterflies were dancing on the air, and the sun neared the zenith, pavilions were pitched, and all the warriors rested; and then they feasted again, and then played knightly games, and late in the afternoon marched on once more, singing of Carcassonne.

And night came down with its mystery on the forest, and gave their demoniac look again to the trees, and rolled up out of misty hollows a huge and yellow moon.

And the men of Arn lit fires, and sudden shadows arose and leaped fantastically

away. And the night-wind blew, arising like a ghost, and passed between the tree-trunks, and slipped down shimmering glades, and waked the prowling beasts still dreaming of day, and drifted nocturnal birds afield to menace timorous things, and beat the roses against cottagers' panes, and whispered news of the befriending night, and wafted to the ears of wandering men the sound of a maiden's song, and gave a glamour to the lutanist's tune played in his loneliness on distant hills; and the deep eyes of moths glowed like a galleon's lamps, and they spread their wings and sailed their familiar sea. Upon this night-wind also the dreams of Camorak's men floated to Carcassonne.

All the next morning they marched, and all the evening, and knew they were nearing now the deeps of the forest. And the citizens of Arn kept close together and close behind the warriors. For the deeps of the forest were all unknown to travellers, but not unknown to those tales of fear that men tell at evening to their friends, in the comfort and the safety of their hearths. Then night appeared, and an enormous

moon. And the men of Camorak slept. Sometimes they woke, and went to sleep again; and those that stayed awake for long and listened heard heavy two-footed creatures pad through the night on paws.

As soon as it was light the unarmed men of Arn began to slip away, and went back by bands through the forest. When darkness came they did not stop to sleep, but continued their flight straight on until they came to Arn, and added there by the tales they told to the terror of the forest.

But the warriors feasted, and afterwards Arleon rose, and played his harp, and led them on again; and a few faithful servants stayed with them still. And they marched all day through a gloom that was as old as night, but Arleon's inspiration burned in his mind like a star. And he led them till the birds began to drop into the tree-tops, and it was evening and they all encamped. They had only one pavilion left to them now, and near it they lit a fire, and Camorak posted a sentry with drawn sword just beyond the glow of the firelight. Some of the warriors slept in the pavilion and others round about it.

When dawn came something terrible had killed and eaten the sentry. But the splendour of the rumours of Carcassonne and Fate's decree that they should never come there, and the inspiration of Arleon and his harp, all urged the warriors on; and they marched deeper and deeper all day into the forest.

Once they saw a dragon that had caught a bear and was playing with it, letting it run a little way and overtaking it with a paw.

They came at last to a clear space in the forest just before nightfall. An odour of flowers arose from it like a mist, and every drop of dew interpreted heaven unto itself.

It was the hour when twilight kisses Earth.

It was the hour when a meaning comes into senseless things, and trees out-majesty the pomp of monarchs, and the timid creatures steal abroad to feed, and as yet the beasts of prey harmlessly dream, and Earth utters a sigh, and it is night.

In the midst of the wide clearing Camorak's warriors camped, and rejoiced to see the stars again appearing one by one.

That night they ate the last of their provisions, and slept unmolested by the prowling things that haunt the gloom of the forest.

On the next day some of the warriors hunted stags, and others lay in rushes by a neighboring lake and shot arrows at water-fowl. One stag was killed, and some geese, and several teal.

Here the adventurers stayed, breathing the pure wild air that cities know not; by day they hunted, and lit fires by night, and sang and feasted, and forgot Carcassonne. The terrible denizens of the gloom never molested them, venison was plentiful, and all manner of water-fowl: they loved the chase by day, and by night their favourite songs. Thus day after day went by, thus week after week. Time flung over this encampment a handful of noons, the gold and silver moons that waste the year away; Autumn and Winter passed, and Spring appeared; and still the warriors hunted and feasted there.

One night of the springtide they were feasting about a fire and telling tales of the chase, and the soft moths came

out of the dark and flaunted their colours in the firelight, and went out grey into the dark again; and the night wind was cool upon the warriors' necks, and the camp-fire was warm in their faces, and a silence had settled among them after some song, and Arleon all at once rose suddenly up, remembering Carcassonne. And his hand swept over the strings of his harp, awaking the deeper chords, like the sound of a nimble people dancing their steps on bronze, and the music rolled away into the night's own silence, and the voice of Arleon rose:

"When there is blood in the bath she knows there is war in the mountains, and longs for the battle-shout of kingly men."

And suddenly all shouted, "Carcassonne!" And at that word their idleness was gone as a dream is gone from a dreamer waked with a shout. And soon the great march began that faltered no more nor wavered. Unchecked by battles, undaunted in lonesome spaces, ever unwearied by the vulturous years, the warriors of Camorak held on; and Arleon's inspiration led them still. They cleft with the music of Arleon's harp

the gloom of ancient silences; they went singing into battles with terrible wild men, and came out singing, but with fewer voices; they came to villages in valleys full of the music of bells, or saw the lights at dusk of cottages sheltering others.

They became a proverb for wandering, and a legend arose of strange, disconsolate men. Folks spoke of them at nightfall when the fire was warm and rain slipped down the eaves; and when the wind was high small children feared the Men Who Would Not Rest were going clattering past. Strange tales were told of men in old grey armour moving at twilight along the tops of the hills and never asking shelter; and mothers told their boys who grew impatient of home that the grey wanderers were once so impatient and were now hopeless of rest, and were driven along with the rain whenever the wind was angry.

But the wanderers were cheered in their wandering by the hope of coming to Carcassonne, and later on by anger against Fate, and at last they marched on still because it seemed better to march on than to think.

For many years they had wandered and had fought with many tribes; often they gathered legends in villages and listened to idle singers singing songs; and all the rumours of Carcassonne still came from the South.

And then one day they came to a hilly land with a legend in it that only three valleys away a man might see, on clear days, Carcassonne. Tired though they were and few, and worn with the years which had all brought them wars, they pushed on instantly, led still by Arleon's inspiration which dwindled in his age, though he made music with his old harp still.

All day they climbed down into the first valley and for two days ascended, and came to the Town That May Not Be Taken In War below the top of the mountain, and its gates were shut against them, and there was no way round. To left and right steep precipices stood for as far as eye could see or legend tell of, and the pass lay through the city. Therefore Camorak drew up his remaining warriors in line of battle to wage their last war, and they stepped forward over the crisp bones of old, unburied armies.

No sentinel defied them in the gate, no arrow flew from any tower of war. One citizen climbed alone to the mountain's top, and the rest hid themselves in sheltered places.

Now, in the top of the mountain was a deep, bowl-like cavern in the rock, in which fires bubbled softly. But if any cast a boulder into the fires, as it was the custom for one of those citizens to do when enemies approached them, the mountain hurled up intermittent rocks for three days, and the rocks fell flaming all over the town and all round about it. And just as Camorak's men began to batter the gate they heard a crash on the mountain, and a great rock fell beyond them and rolled into the valley. The next two fell in front of them on the iron roofs of the town. Just as they entered the town a rock found them crowded in a narrow street, and shattered two of them. The mountain smoked and panted; with every pant a rock plunged into the streets or bounced along the heavy iron roof, and the smoke went slowly up, and up, and up.

When they had come through the long

town's empty streets to the locked gate at the end, only fifteen were left. When they had broken down the gate there were only ten alive. Three more were killed as they went up the slope, and two as they passed near the terrible cavern. Fate let the rest go some way down the mountain upon the other side, and then took three of them. Camorak and Arleon alone were left alive. And night came down on the valley to which they had come, and was lit by flashes from the fatal mountain; and the two mourned for their comrades all night long.

But when the morning came they remembered their war with Fate, and their old resolve to come to Carcassonne, and the voice of Arleon rose in a quavering song, and snatches of music from his old harp, and he stood up and marched with his face southwards as he had done for years, and behind him Camorak went. And when at last they climbed from the third valley, and stood on the hill's summit in the golden sunlight of evening, their aged eyes saw only miles of forest and the birds going to roost.

Their beards were white, and they had travelled very far and hard; it was the time with them when a man rests from labours and dreams in light sleep of the years that were and not of the years to come.

Long they looked southwards; and the sun set over remoter forests, and glow-worms lit their lamps, and the inspiration of Arleon rose and flew away for ever, to gladden, perhaps, the dreams of younger men.

And Arleon said: "My King, I know no longer the way to Carcassonnne."

And Camorak smiled, as the aged smile, with little cause for mirth, and said: "The years are going by us like huge birds, whom Doom and Destiny and the schemes of God have frightened up out of some old grey marsh. And it may well be that against these no warrior may avail, and that Fate has conquerored us, and that our quest has failed."

And after this they were silent.

Then they drew their swords, and side by side went down into the forest, still seeking for Carcassonne.

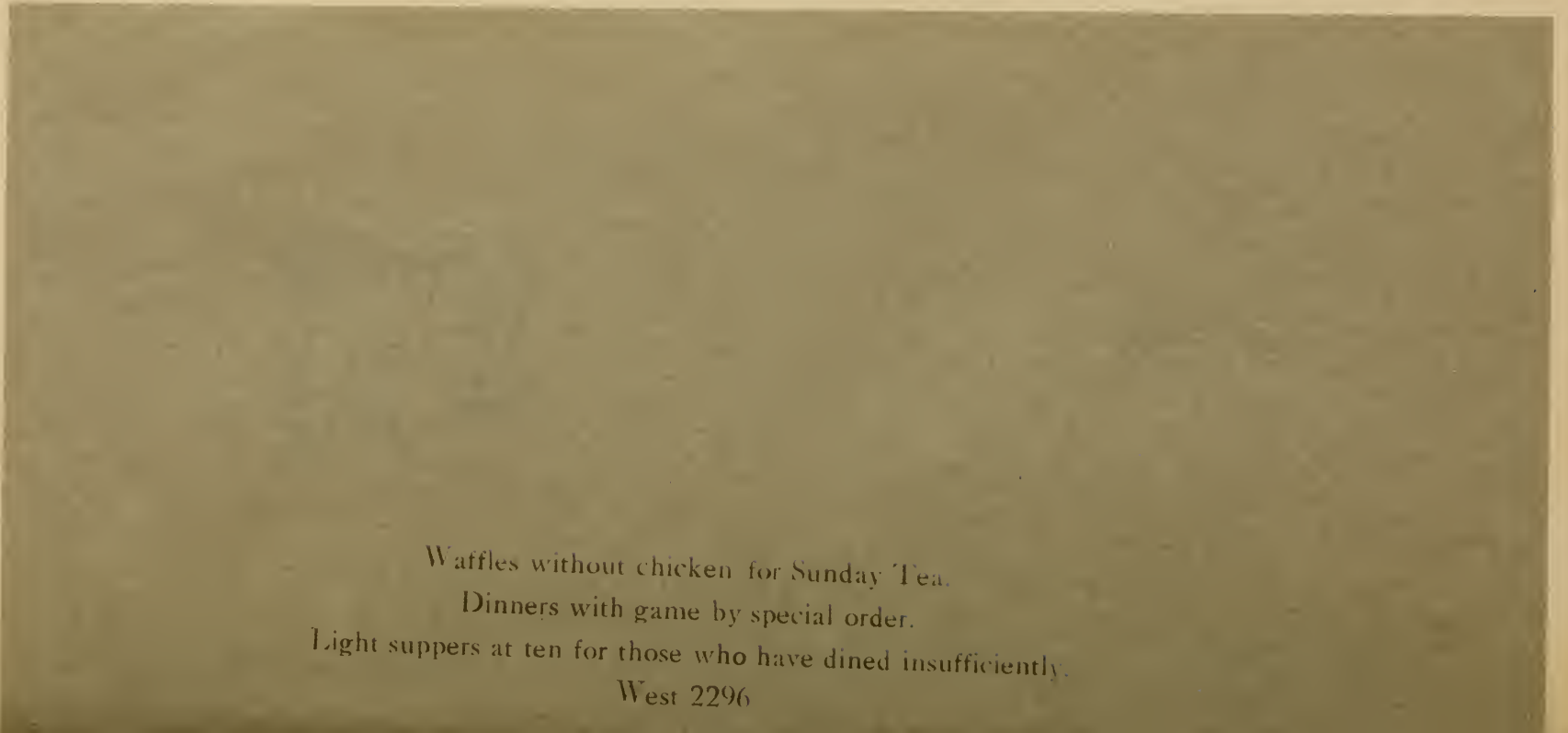
I think they got not far; for there were

deadly marshes in that forest, and gloom that outlasted the nights, and fearful beasts accustomed to its ways. Neither is there any legend, either in verse or among the songs of the people of the fields, of any having come to Carcassonne.

CARCASSONNE
28TH AND Q STREETS, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

WOULD YOU EVER HAVE IT SAID OF YOU

"But he, he never came to Carcassonne"


Waffles without chicken for Sunday Tea.
Dinners with game by special order.
Light suppers at ten for those who have dined insufficiently.
West 2296

Ice-Cream and heaps of it:

Or you may just smoke and not be asked to pay for the caviar:

You may write:

You may read:

You may dance:

AND THEN YOU TOO WILL KNOW WHY

"For Carcassonne evening weepeth when evening passeth away."

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